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ABSTRACT

This illustrated book chronicles the history of the one-room school in the Midwest and its vital influence on American education from the pioneer era through consolidation after World War II. The Midwest's one-room schools were the most democratic in the nation. Located in small independent school districts, they were sustained with the barest of resources by civic-minded farmers who voted taxes, set budgets, constructed schools, elected school boards, hired teachers, and approved curricula. Their efforts virtually wiped out illiteracy and strengthened their children's devotion to democracy. The material culture of rural education is documented, including McGuffey Readers, wooden desks, slate blackboards, potbellied stoves, kerosene lamps, and screened privies. Also described are the ways that rural children went to school, how they dressed, the games they played, and the lessons they learned. The book recounts the life of the typical teacher who was usually female, young, unmarried, and educated in one-room schools and county teacher institutes. At various times, the schools were used as churches, polling places, sites of political caucuses, and meeting halls for local organizations. However, as America urbanized and the movement to consolidate took hold in rural counties, one-room schools were left at the margins of the educational system. Some were torn down, some left to weather away, some sold at auction, and still others transformed into museums. The book contends that, despite its demise, this was a school system that worked, due largely to the pervasiveness of community involvement. This book contains numerous photographs and illustrations and an index. (LP)



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